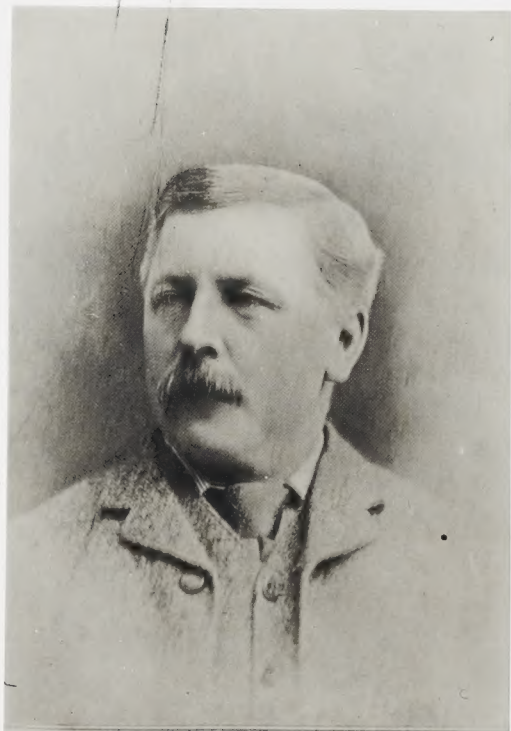




Charles Mair

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"CHARLES MAIR"

Born 1838

Died 1927

By Thyrza Young Burkitt

We throw the spotlight on the life work of one of the most beloved of our Canadian Poets, Dr. Charles Mair. The knowledge he gained from the thrills and adventures of youth, qualified him for the peaceful profession of a writer in his later years.

He was the author of "Tecumseh", "Through the Mackenzie Basin," and "Dreamland and Other Poems." History relates that he was dean of Canadian Authors of Post Confederation Literature. We think his memoirs are of particular interest to the people of Lethbridge, where he made many staunch friends while stationed at Couuts, on different occasions, as Inspector of Immigration. We have reason to believe the last Post he held for the government was at the Port of ~~Couuts~~ *Let Steele B.C. where he afterwards acted as tax collector.*

After Mr. Mair's superannuation, he paid a visit to Australia, and upon his return to Canada via Vancouver, B.C. that city declared a civic holiday giving our beloved poet the military salute. The Vancouver daily press gave wide publicity to the occasion, devoting pages to the life and accomplishments, and character of our Master-Craftsman. He died in ~~Vancouver~~ *Victoria*, B.C. in 1927 at the age of 89 years.

Charles Mair was a fairly ^a small man of medium build, with a short ~~light~~ ^{on} mustache. He was quiet and unassuming. The Poet was always neatly attired and in later years, no matter what the fashion, he clung to the straight high collar and cravat tie. His

voice was soft. His good English and clear statements were very convincing. Mair, was a brisk walker, and carried a cane. When he left Coutts, he was a trifle stopped and graying with advancing years.

At the age of 31 years, he married a niece of Sir John Shultz. His wife predeceased him many years ago.

We believe their only daughter, Mrs. J. McLean resides in Fort Steele, B.C.

Mr. Mair's life was one of consistency throughout. To him, love and nature, were an evergreen topic to enrich his verse. He found beauty and inspiration in the smugness of the East, and the sweeping plains of the West.

Mr. Charles F. Moberly Sr. of Sweet Grass, Montana, a close friend of the Poet for many years, wrote;---"Mr. Mair in my opinion was one of the brightest, one of the most honourable and lovable men of his day and generation, and further, he knew more and knew less than any man I have ever met--more about the finer, nobler things of life and less about the common, understood and necessary."

Mr. J. C. Burkitt said of his friend Mr. Mair, "He was a very fine man, beloved by those who knew him for his sympathetic kindly interest. I can't recall in the years that I knew him, that he was ever known to betray a confidence. Those who took his advice reaped happy results."

One morning a young bachelor was absent from the office. "Where is Jack this morning?" "O" the relieving officer answered casually, "He's in jail"----"In jail--what for?" he asked. "Wife beating" was the reply---"The inhuman brute" exclaimed the Poet. Jack wondered why Mr. Mair deliberately passed him by the next day, instead of the usual cheery "Good Morning."

Mr. Charles Mair attended Perth Grammar School, and 3.
later entered Queens University. Before he completed his medical course in 1868, he was called to Ottawa by the Minister of Public Works to sift the material in the Parliamentary Library on the Hudson Bay Co.

The Poet was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1889. Two years before his death in 1925, Queens Univeristy conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws.

In 1869 he left with the first expedition to the North-West. He was sent to map out a new immigration route for the government.

The first Riel Rebellion broke out in the fall of 1869. Mr. Mair was made a prisoner with Shultz and Scott, just three months after his marriage. The Indians threw Christmas dinner of tainted meat, into their rude place of confinement, to them, on a pitch fork. This was four years before the originals of the North West Mounted Police came west. Mr. Mair told many a thrilling tale of his hardening experiences with the Indians at that time. The three men escaped but Mr. Mair lost all of his manuscripts.

He assisted in the founding of the "Canada First Party."

His description of Tecumseh is very lifelike; he was a chieftain who possessed a supremely noble mind, which would naturally appeal to Charles Mair.

The Poet then returned to the North-West at the outbreak of the second Riel Rebellion in 1885, as Quarter-master in the Governor-General's Bodyguard. Later he became Immigration Officer at different Ports in the North-West.

"Through The Mackenzie Basin" tells a vivid account of an exploratory trip he took into the Peace River Country, as well as a record of the Peace River Treaty 1899.

Technically he was a much finer craftsman than many of his predecessors. Well read in the modern English poets, he had studied the forms of verse and mechanics of versification. The subjects of his poetry were the common-place lowly creatures of nature.

Lyrical poetry appears for the first time in Canadian Literature in Mair's work. His poems are Canadian through and through and is authentic poetry.

Canadian Literature is growing more truly Canadian, and is gaining power to express the life, and spirit, of the Canadian people. With a large number of young writers of promise, Canadians may well look forward to some expressive literature of Canada.

When one has finished reading the work of Dr. Mair, ^{whodled} the thought is emedded on one's mind that: "Of all music that which reaches farthest into heaven, is the beating of a loving heart."

May the old pioneer so strong and true,
Revere the old mode, and accept the new.
Like the young tenderfoot who came out West,
He could not ride the horse, but did his bouncing best.